

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly

VOLUME XVII No. 1

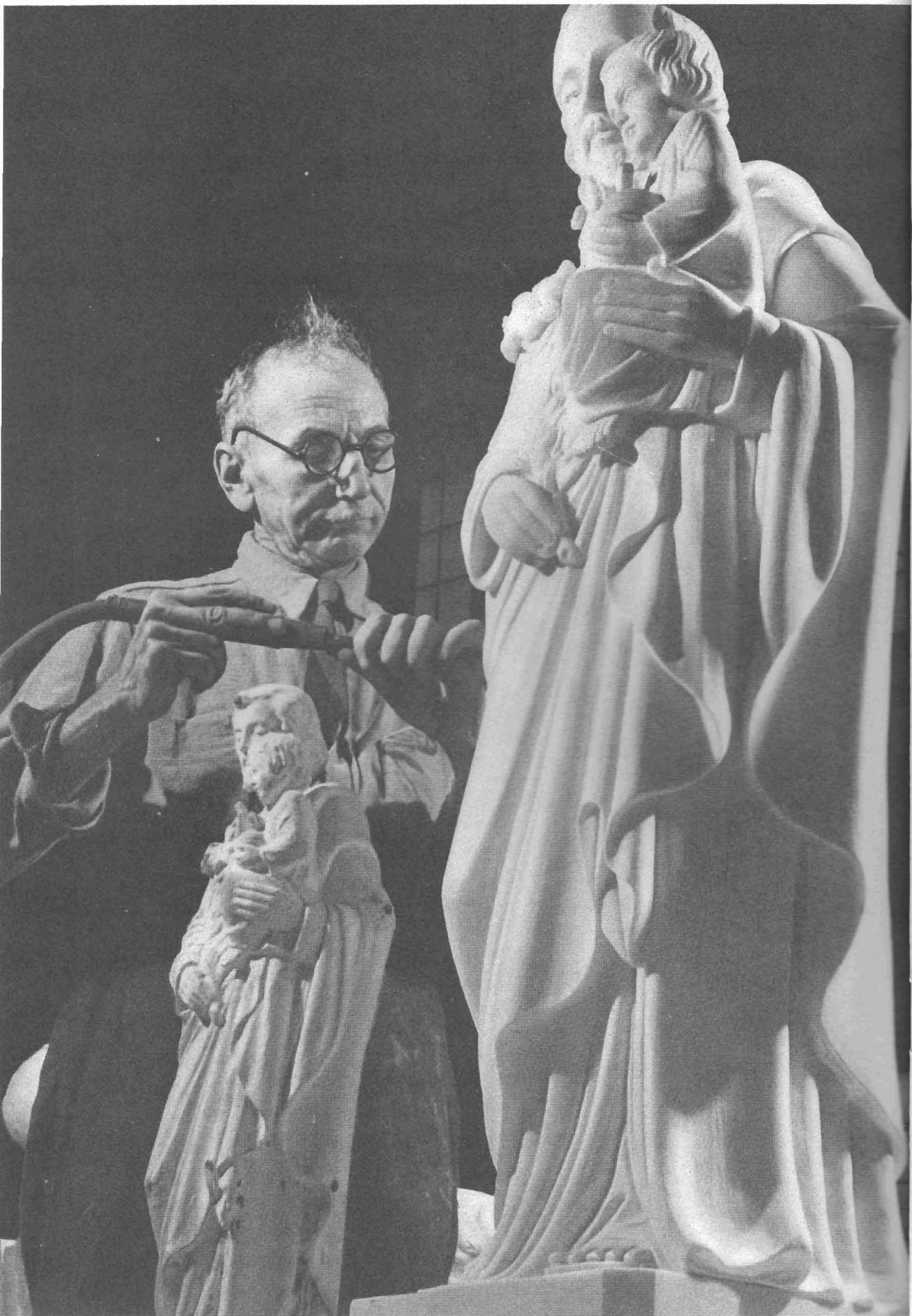
1987

ARISTIDE JOHN PICCINI

Sculptor 1883-1952



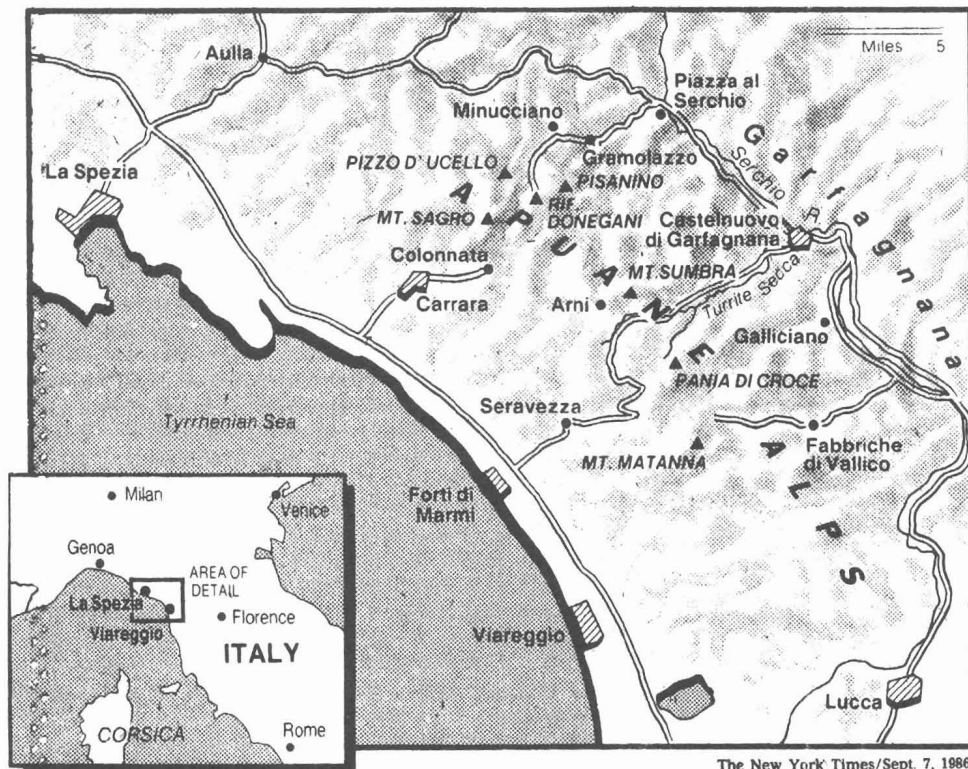
Piccini working (top center) on the replacement of the Ethan Allen statue which stands on the portico of the Vermont State House; unveiled in August, 1941



ARISTIDE JOHN PICCINI

Sculptor

By Madeline Piccini Louras and Gloria Piccini Frankiewicz
As told to Jean C. Ross



Carrara, from which Piccini came, is in the upper left corner. The city is located in the foothills of the Apuane Mountains, the source of much of Italy's fine marble.

The work of his hands is not exhibited within the famous museums of the world but the rare talent of this sculptor adorns the exteriors of museums, as well as public buildings, churches and the wide expanse of parks and cemeteries in the country of his adoption. His is the immortality sustaining a love of country for millions of visitors who gaze at the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. His is the comfort brought to families, as loved ones are remembered by the statues and headstones he carved. Communities have been drawn together as people had monuments and statues raised to commemorate their heroes and honored war dead.

Aristide John Piccini was brought to this country in 1910 by the Vermont Marble Company in Proctor. Born on 28 November 1883, he was a native of Carrara, Italy. The most famous quarries for any stone are the marble quarries at Carrara. Stone from them was used in Rome at the time of the Emperor Augustus. The finest varieties of pure white marble were discovered much later and were made famous by the great sculptors, Leonardo de Vinci and Michaelangelo.



Panoramic view of Carrara

Ari Piccini had one brother and one sister. His mother died when he was five years old. It was a close, extended family and nurturing the young lad fell to his grandmother who cared for him in the summertime at the fishing village of Lerici on the Ligurian Sea. There he had the freedom of the beach and the docks and the boyhood dreams of adventures beyond the sea.

Ari's father eventually remarried. The boy, with his brother and sister, was absorbed into the new family which, in time, consisted of five half-brothers. Ari early showed he had deft fingers when given a block of marble to carve a figurine or an object d'arte. He was a very young lad when he was enrolled in the prestigious Accademia di Belle Arti where he learned to use the tools of the sculptor.



The Accademia di Belle Arti in Carrara where Piccini developed his professional skills

Andréa Piccini, Ari's brother, grew up to be the owner of a marble quarry in Carrara. The quarry is visible from the family home, a dramatic skyline of white resembling a snow-capped mountain. When Andrea died in 1949, he not only left an industrial legacy to his two sons, but the old homestead in Carrara, as well, where they are still living. Aristide's nephews and their sisters have been visited frequently by their American cousins. The cousins have seen the Piccini mill from which marble is shipped throughout Europe.

Aristide Piccini had already proven himself artistically in his native country by the age of 27 when the Vermont Marble Company invited him to emigrate to the United States. The attraction to a better life with higher wages may well have been coupled in his mind with the knowledge that the largest American marble quarry lay in Vermont. He would be in an environment that would not be unfamiliar. Despite any cultural shock that he may have had, Aristide, once here, soon demonstrated his intent to become integrated into his new country. He quickly learned to speak English and to take steps to establish a family. He began to court Ida Marie Franzoni, age 18, who had also been born in Italy, but whose family had already settled in the Rutland area. A year later the young couple was married. They eventually built a permanent home at 51 Watkins Avenue. They raised a family of five children. It has remained a close, affectionate family, which reveres the memory of a very gifted father.

Ida Piccini was an opera buff. In the eyes of her children she was a great storyteller, not only of fairy tales, but she kept alive their heritage, as well, with stories of her girlhood in Italy and the music of Italian opera. As long as she lived, she maintained a lively correspondence with relatives in her native country. She saved every letter, every postcard with scenes of Carrara, of the countryside and the Apuane Mountains. Shoe boxes are full of postcards, treasured by her children. Though in mid-life now and separated, the Piccini children visit each other often: Madeline P. Louras and Gloria P. Frankiewicz have remained in Rutland; Harry lives in Essex Junction; Vera P. Walsh on St. Simons Island, Georgia, and Lea P. Crowley in Burlington, Vermont.



Vermont Marble Company employees of the building shed; circa 1915. Aristide Piccini is in the third row, right center, the only man wearing a necktie.



Ida Marie and Aristide John Piccini on their wedding day

It is mainly through the records kept by the family that the career of Aristide Piccini can be partially reconstructed. He worked for 39 years for the marble company before he retired in 1949. He was the supervising sculptor during the construction of the Jefferson Memorial in the nation's capitol. Most of the statuary adorning the Supreme Court building in Washington is the work of Piccini. His chief contribution there was the carving of the 13 eagles, which represent the 13 original states. He worked also on the intricate carving for a mausoleum ordered by William Randolph Hearst, newspaper publisher, which was erected in a California cemetery. The rasps and chisels of Piccini and his cohort, Harry Pellistri, are known to have been used to carve the ornamental designs on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.



"Known but to God"



Piccini was the supervising sculptor during the construction of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C., which was dedicated 13 April 1943.



The chief work by Piccini on the Supreme Court Building was the carving of the 13 eagles on the frieze. They represent the 13 original states. The building was completed in 1935.

For many years Mr. Piccini exhibited and demonstrated sculpturing on behalf of the marble company, at the Eastern States Exposition in Springfield, Massachusetts. His picture and some of his works appeared in various magazines, such as *Life*, *Photography*, and *Popular Mechanics*. Public acclaim was received in 1942 when he completed a statue of Mayor Harry Wooding of Danville, Virginia. The mayor had served the city for 46 years, which the community believed was a world's record for continuous duty. He died at the age of 94 years. It was decided to commemorate their venerable mayor by a statue to be erected at the steps of the city hall where he had served so long. The city fathers specified that the statue had to be a photographic likeness and meet with the general approval of the people of Danville. Aristide Piccini carried out the assignment. The verdict of the city of Danville was conveyed in a letter to the Vermont Marble Company from the city's Exchange Club:

It is fitting, we think, to express to you who so capably executed this outstanding memorial, our thanks for the part you played in making it possible.

Perhaps, no other object within the corporate limits of this city has ever been examined by so many critical eyes; and surely, no object anywhere so examined has met with a more universal expression of complete satisfaction. All the comments we have heard, and they have been countless, might be condensed into the words of a local attorney who, after looking at the statue, said, "I can see him standing there.... as if he might speak to me."

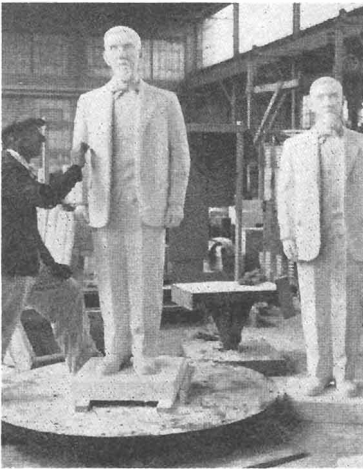
It is hard to convey to you the importance to us of the successful fulfillment of this project which had its beginning in December, 1940, and reached its climax at the unveiling ceremony July 5, 1942. But we do want you to know that your efforts in our behalf all during this period are deeply appreciated; and now, looking on it all, we can say to you in all sincerity, "Well done".

Piccini's skill is to be seen in his home community, as well. Rutlanders do not have to travel any farther than South Main Street and Christ the King Church to see the carving by Piccini over the main entrance. According to the family, their father also carved the lettering on the Rutland post office.





*The statue of Danville, Virginia's
venerable mayor,
unveiled on 5 July 1942*



Of interest to all Vermonters is the eight-foot statue of Ethan Allen which stands on the portico of the State House in Montpelier. In 1855 the State Legislature appropriated \$2,000 to erect a monument to Ethan Allen. It was originally to be placed over the grave of the patriot in Burlington. Larkin Goldsmith Mead of Brattleboro and Florence, Italy, submitted a design but the subscription drive to raise additional funds failed. A year later the legislature appropriated an additional \$2,000 for the statue to be placed instead on the portico. Mead was again chosen as the sculptor. The statue was unveiled at the gala ceremony on 10 October 1861. Its heroic stance "creates the reality of the Ticonderoga scene and was perhaps intended to remind legislators and visitors alike of the first blows struck by Vermonters demanding Liberty." *

The statue survived the State House fire in the early 1900s, but by the late '30s it had begun to crumble and needed to be replaced. Aristide Piccini was chosen to create a replica of Mead's Ethan Allen. Imperial Danby marble was selected. Piccini and his assistants carved the body of the statue at the Vermont Marble Company. The extended right arm, symbolizing unity, was transported to Montpelier in its uncut block, to prevent breakage. The finishing of the arm and some of the detailed work was completed on the site. **

The statue was unveiled on Wednesday, 29 October 1941. Governor William H. Wills sent a special invitation to Piccini to be an honored guest at the ceremonies. He was introduced by Lieutenant Governor Mortimer Proctor. Dean C. Davis gave the address when the statue was unveiled. Great satisfaction was expressed by everyone who viewed the new Ethan. The November 1941 issue of the Vermont Marble Company's publication, "Marble Chips", paid tribute to the sculptor:

Mr. Piccini and his assistants did a magnificent job of carving and the stock provided is very beautiful. The Allen statue is not only a fine tribute to a great leader but also is an outstanding example of the unexcelled marble sculptures our company can produce.

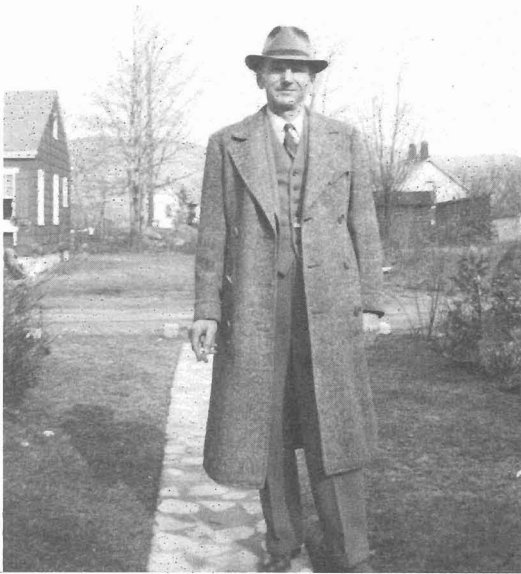
In 1948, shortly before Piccini's retirement, he and his wife and two of his daughters revisited Italy, seeking-out relatives and his birthplace where he spent his early years learning the techniques of his art. But Piccini was in failing health. With his creative life still undiminished, he died at home on 30 March 1952 at the age of 68. He is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery in Rutland. Piccini was one of the last true sculptors brought from Italy at the turn of the century. Only one of the "old guard" was left at the time to carry on. He was Pilade Bardi and he retired within six months of Piccini's death.

Piccini's wife, Ida, nine years his junior, lived to be 82 years of age. She was laid to rest beside her husband on 9 November 1974. Of the 16 grandchildren, the eight grandsons of Aristide and Ida Piccini were bearers at their grandmother's funeral. The third generation of the family has widely scattered. Their lives have taken them to Alaska, California, Montana; to New Jersey, Connecticut and New York City, as well as to the Boston area and Burlington, Vermont. Only one grandson and two granddaughters returned to Rutland. Though no descendants have become sculptors, Piccini's creative mind and skill have been passed in one form or another to many of his grandchildren.

**The Vermont State House by Daniel Roberts, 1980*

***Although the original statue, designed and executed by the well-known Larkin Mead, was damaged, it was not saved, unfortunately, for the sake of history. Apparently, it was discarded in 1941.*





The sculptor in his mid-fifties.

Family home at 51 Watkins Avenue, Rutland, Vermont



MORTIMER R. PROCTOR
PROCTOR, VERMONT

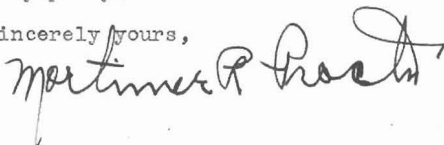
April 8, 1952

Dear Mrs. Piccini,

The Vermont Marble Company has lost one of its most loyal and capable men in Mr. Piccini's death. He was an outstanding artist in his particular kind of work. A business such as ours is fortunate to have had the loyal service of such a man for so many years. His work has enhanced the prestige of the Company in many parts of the country. His going brings a real sense of loss to all of us interested in this business.

Mrs. Proctor and I extend to you our very sincere sympathy.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mortimer R. Proctor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mortimer" being more prominent and the last name "Proctor" following in a similar style. There is a small mark above the "r" in "Proctor".

Mrs. Aristide J. Piccini
51 Watkins Avenue
Rutland, Vermont

A letter of condolence to Mrs. Piccini from Mortimer Proctor, president of the Vermont Marble Company

Aristide Piccini had 39 productive years with the Vermont Marble Company. While he came in time to use power tools for the general shaping of the stock, his was an era of the Renaissance style when hand tools were used with great delicacy in working the final details of any commission. Piccini imported all of his rasps and hand tools from Italy. One cannot help but speculate what his personal fame might have been had he chosen to be an independent artist. However, he remained a company man with the comparative anonymity that goes with not being self-employed. This was not unusual in the era in which he lived. Self-employment among newcomers to this country was not a customary way of life, especially for persons with artistic talent. Nonetheless, Piccini carved out a permanent place in the world of fine art. He was born, so to speak, into stone.... part of the rich tradition of stone carvers and the historical importance of their work. When the company announced a contest in 1945 to obtain a fitting title for a new technicolor film, 168 suggestions were submitted. Mr. Piccini won the \$30 prize, for which the judges had selected the title: *Cavalcade Of Marble*. Certainly, Aristide Piccini's work in stone has been a cavalcade of marble, touching more lives in more places than confinement in museums.



Picture Credits: Jefferson Memorial and Supreme Court Building, Deborah Ross; entrance to Christ the King Church, Thomas K. Egan; all other pictures relating to the sculptor and his works provided through the courtesy of the Piccini family

Death Hastens End of Era

Few Marble Artists Left

Aristide Piccini, Buried Yesterday
One of Last of Little Known Stone Sculptors.

The death of Aristide J. Piccini, 68, of 51 Watkins Avenue, brings nearer to a close an era in the state of Vermont.

Aristide J. Piccini was one of the last of those unknown or little known artists — true sculptors and old masters brought from Italy to this country at the turn of the century by the Vermont Marble company — whose works now adorn public and private buildings, parks and cemeteries throughout the world.

He died Sunday and was buried yesterday.

His death follows less than a month that of Alfred C. Fregosi of Proctor, another of those artists whose works probably have never sat on the floors of museums in this country, but who undoubtedly worked on the intricate carvings and statuary that grace their exteriors.

The passing of Aristide J. Piccini, after a long and lingering illness, leave just one of the "old guard" left to carry on. He is Pilade Bardi.

On the shoulders of Bardi now — for a short time, he retires June 15 — lies the work of many good men, such as Mr Fregosi and Mr. Piccini, who are not — and probably could not be — replaced by the company.

Mr. Piccini came to the United States and the state of Vermont in 1910 shortly after he had graduated from the famous Academy School of Arts at Carrara, Italy.

From that time until his retirement in 1949 — 39 years later — he carved many outstanding statues from marble dug from the Green Mountains.

To look at the skill of Mr. Piccini Rutlanders do not have to travel any farther than Christ the King church where a statue carved by him is in place over the main entrance.

For further examples of his art, Vermonters have only to travel to the state capital city of Montpelier where the new statue of Ethan Allen was unveiled in 1941. The work on this statue brought commendations to Piccini from state officials and artists throughout the state and country.

Among his other work are hundreds of statues of the Blessed Virgin, and carvings in bas relief of da Vinci's famous picture of "The Last Supper".

He was supervising sculptor during the construction of the Jefferson Memorial at Washington D.C. and worked on the Lincoln Memorial there.

Most of the statuary adorning the new Supreme court building at Washington is the work of Piccini, whose chief task was carving the 13 eagles, which represent the 13 original states, on the building.

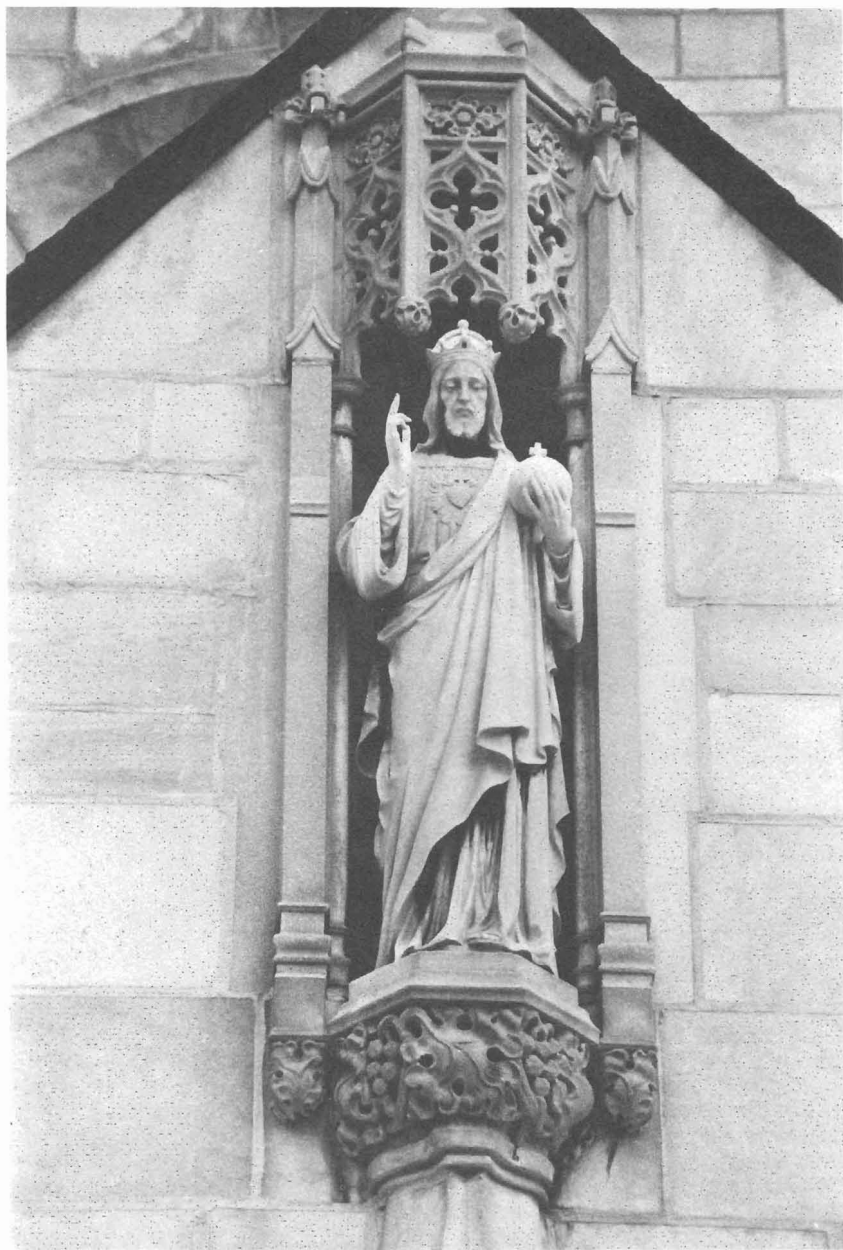
He worked on the intricate carvings for the mausoleum ordered by the late William Randolph Hearst and erected in a California cemetery.

His picture with some of his works has appeared in Life, Photography, Popular Mechanics and many other magazines. For years he exhibited sculpturing of marble in the Vermont building at the Eastern States Exposition grounds in Springfield, Mass.

Shortly before his retirement Piccini with his wife and two daughters re-visited Italy, where he visited his birthplace and where he spent his early years learning the art, which never made him world famous.

Perhaps the best tribute to his work came from a colored man in Danville, Va., where a statue carved in marble was erected of the former mayor and brought the comment: "It sho look so much lak 'im ah almo'spec 'im to tug at his beard."

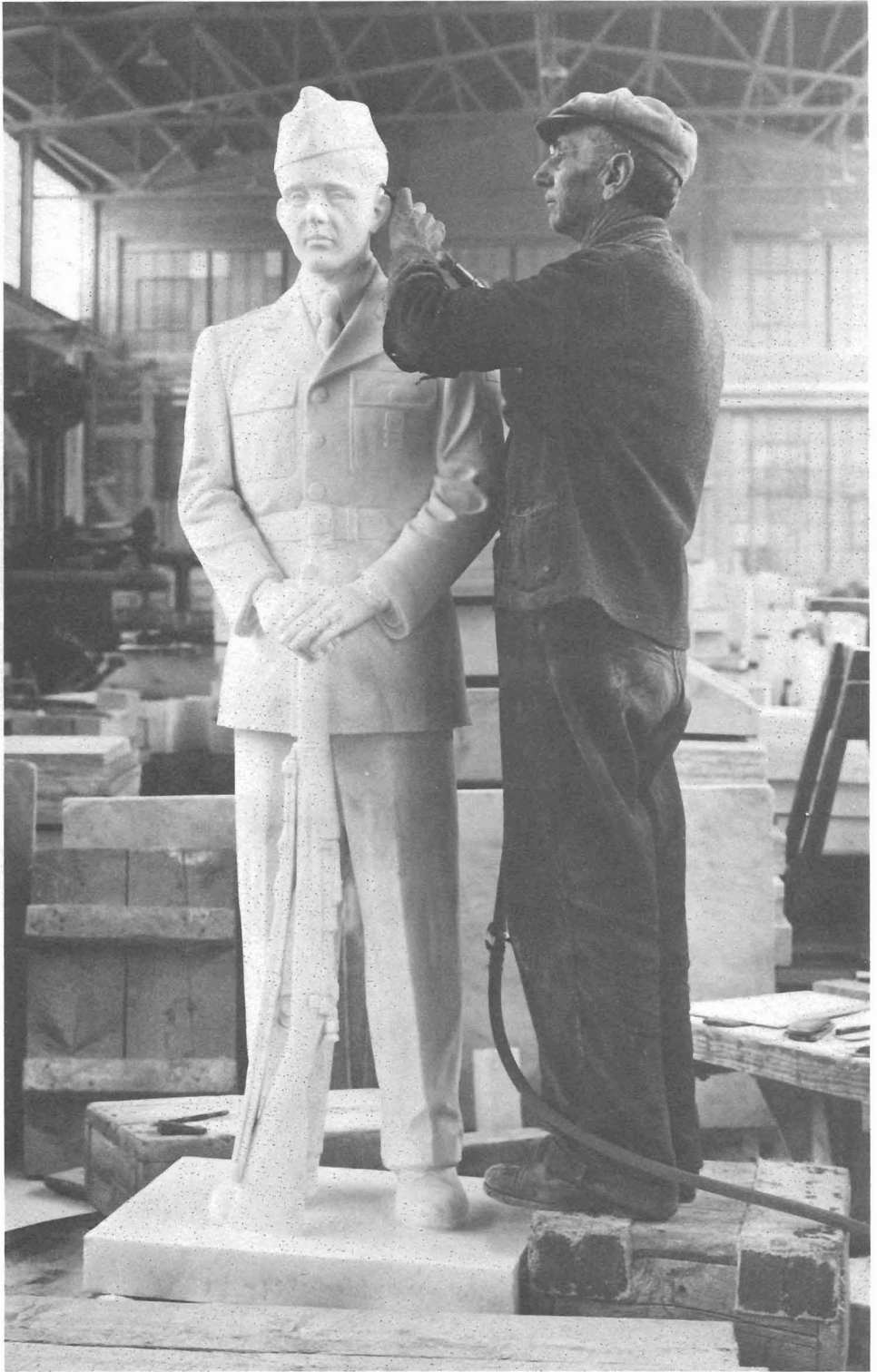
Some Examples of the Sculptor's Works from the Piccini Family Album



The main entrance to Christ the King Church was executed by Piccini. Research has not verified that the figure of Christ in the niche was done by the sculptor. It may have been imported directly from Italy.









THIS HOUSE BEARS THE NAME OF THE
CHARLES EZRA GREEN
1842-1903
FIRST DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING
IN THIS UNIVERSITY

FOR THIRTY YEARS HIS PROFESSOR OF CIVIL
ENGINEERING HE DEvised METHODS OF
GRAPHIC ANALYSES WHICH GREATLY
ADVANCED THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
DESIGN IN STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING



RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
101 CENTER STREET, RUTLAND, VERMONT 05701
(802) 775-2006; 775-0179

Membership in the Society is open to all upon payment of appropriate dues. (See the dues schedule below.) With membership, for its period, go a subscription to the Quarterly, any newsletters, a copy of the Annual Report, entitlement to vote at business meetings, and benefits accruing from support of the Society's Museums, exhibits, programs, collections and library. The year through which membership is paid and the category are noted on all address labels.

Please send any address change on Postal Service Form 3576 (a postcard freely available at your local post office).

Annual dues categories are:	Sustaining \$100 or more	Contributing \$15
	Sponsor \$ 25	Regular \$ 5

Special one-payment categories are:	Life \$125	Memorial \$150
-------------------------------------	------------	----------------

Advance payment for 2 or 3 years is welcome, helping to reduce costs.

Please make checks payable to: Rutland Historical Society
and send to: Treasurer
62 Ormsbee Ave., Proctor, VT. 05765

Manuscripts are invited; address correspondence to the Managing Editor.

Editor: Michael L. Austin

Managing Editor: Jean C. Ross

Copyright © 1987, The Rutland Historical Society, Inc.

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
101 Center Street
Rutland, Vermont 05701

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED
FORWARDING AND
RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Rutland, Vermont
Permit No. 12



The number or letter on the address label indicates your dues status:
86 one year in arrears 87 current L life membership